



NEWS RELEASE

HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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Police arrest one, search for second suspect in human trafficking case

Howard County police have charged a Delaware woman with human trafficking of a juvenile in Howard County and have issued an arrest warrant for a man believed to be her accomplice.

Janice Figueroa, 19, who is transient and has lived in New Jersey, but is believed to be operating out of Delaware, has been charged with multiple counts of human trafficking and prostitution. Police are searching for her accomplice, Nathaniel Lee Thompson, 28, of Delaware, for similar charges.

“We will not tolerate human trafficking in Howard County,” said Police Chief Gary Gardner. “The police department will continue to devote resources to arresting traffickers and doing all we can to help and protect victims.”

Howard County detectives regularly monitor the website Backpage, which is known by police to be used for prostitution, often involving girls who are victims of trafficking. Investigators recognized that one of the ads may involve such activity and contacted the phone number provided in the ad. An undercover detective made an appointment to meet with the girl at a local hotel.

The girl, who was later determined to be 17 years old, was brought to the hotel and dropped off by a man and woman in a Cadillac. Officers observed the Cadillac park at a nearby restaurant. Once in the hotel room, the girl agreed to the exchange of sex for money with an undercover detective, at which time the officer and others nearby identified themselves as law enforcement and confirmed the girl was being prostituted by the man and woman.

Officers approached the Cadillac in the restaurant parking lot and found the woman, Figueroa, lying down in the back seat. The man, later identified as Thompson, had entered the restaurant and escaped through a back door, according to employees.

Detectives learned that the 17-year-old victim was being brought from Delaware to Maryland and Virginia by Figueroa and Thompson for the purposes of prostitution. They were taking a significant portion of any money the girl earned. She was placed with Child Protective Services to be reunited with her family.

This is part of Howard County’s ongoing effort to combat prostitution, human trafficking and related offenses. The county recently created a dedicated account to fund victims’ services and additional police training, and added a second full-time detective to investigate human trafficking cases. Investigators are focused on arresting traffickers and offering assistance to victims through housing, treatment, transportation and other help.

“We are pleased to see that our focus on this issue in Howard County is having an impact,” said County Executive Allan H. Kittleman. “Our strategies of devoting funds to address human trafficking and increasing police resources are paying off in ways that are helping real victims and taking offenders of the streets.”

Figueroa is being held on \$1 million bond at the Howard County Detention Center. Anyone with information on Thompson’s whereabouts, or any human trafficking in Howard County, should call 410-313-STOP or email HCPDcrimetips@howardcountymd.gov.

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